

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

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### ILLEGAL COMMERCE IN EAGLE PARTS DISCOVERED

A ring of more than two dozen traffickers in illegal eagle and other migratory bird parts and feathers has been uncovered in Oklahoma by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service special agents, Secretary of the Interior Rogers C. B. Morton announced today.

It is illegal to buy, sell, barter, or trade in migratory birds and their parts, including eagles.

Secretary Morton said, "The activities of this group resulted in the killing of literally thousands of migratory birds to manufacture Indian artifacts. Many of these are passed off as authentic--and of course, fraudulent--antique art objects, usually with splendid historical anecdotes attached to each to increase its price."

Oklahoma State Game Rangers and the U.S. Attorney's office in Oklahoma City cooperated and assisted in the six-month investigation which culminated today in the issuance of search warrants and summons.

The Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Oklahoma, O. B. Johnston III, said, "We are pleased to assist the Department of the Interior in attempting to control and discourage the senseless killing of migratory birds for monetary profit. It is hoped that through vigorous investigation and prosecution we can discourage others who might be inclined to kill migratory birds and sell the feathers.

(OVER)

Almost two dozen different bird species--including bald and golden eagles and seven kinds of hawks--were involved in a cottage industry operation manufacturing American Indian artifacts--an enterprise that has boomed in recent years. This lucrative market sees eagle carcasses selling on the black market for as high as \$125 each. Wing and tail feathers are used for war bonnets and ceremonial dress. As many as 10 eagles must be killed to make one war bonnet. One fan made solely from tail feathers of the scissor-tailed flycatcher, which sold for \$650, required the killing of 38 birds.

Secretary Morton said, "There are three major points I would like to emphasize concerning commerce in migratory bird and eagle products.

"First, regardless of who killed the bird or how long ago it was killed, it is illegal for these items to enter commerce in any form.

"Secondly, the reason for prohibiting the sale, trade, or purchase of genuine antiques stems from the fact that any traffic in such items invariably puts pressure on living species in order to prolong and increase the commerce.

"Lastly, the prohibition of killing migratory birds, particularly eagles, in no way interferes with American Indian religious ceremonial use of these animal parts. The Interior Department maintains a repository where the remains of all eagles that are killed by accident or die naturally are stored for free distribution by permit to Indians who are practitioners of bona fide tribal religious ceremonies and scientific institutions."